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Uncle Phil.

The Star Well

And Other Stories

By
Roland Williamson

Illustrated by the Author

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To

THE BELOVED MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

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The Star Well

(Courtesy of *Maury's Magazine*)

I WAS making an overland prospecting tour through the Caddo oil field, that wonderful section of Northwest Louisiana, where, within the last few years, from pools some two thousand feet beneath a surface soil notoriously sterile, there has been extracted millions of dollars' worth of oil. My driver, one McGraw, and I were alone in the surrey. McGraw had spoken but briefly during the first two miles, but presently the roughening of the road seemed to loose his tongue, possibly to divert my attention from his unskilful driving.

“Did you ever see a ‘wild well’

afire?" he asked. "It's a sight to see. The last one I saw was the 'Star' well. I worked on that well. It's the last drilling work I've done, and I reckon it'll be the last, because, somehow, it kinda 'got my goat'—the things that happened there. You talk about mixed-up luck, but it was sure in that well.

"Two young fellows, Tom Leigh and John Anderson, owned the well. They were fine, good looking chaps, and came to the field pretty well fixed. I don't think I ever saw two men more to one another than they appeared to be. They were cousins, and had been raised together like brothers. John was as lively as a cricket. He was a plumb minstrel show all the time, and kept the hands around the well in a good humor, telling jokes and singing songs. He

had an extra good voice. There never was a woman in these parts that had such a glorious voice as Tom Leigh's wife had. I am a fool about good music; and whenever I go down to New Orleans, I always take in the French Opera; so, you see, I have heard some good music, and I'm no slouch of a critic either. Of all the music I've ever heard, there was none, to my notion, that came up to Mrs. Leigh's voice. Her name was Virginia, but they called her 'Ginger' —a nickname, she told me, that her little sister had given her back in Virginia, where she was born.

"Tom had a good voice, too; and, at night, out there at the camp, when we had shut down, them three young folks would strike up some song. They seemed to know everything in the way of music; and would go right

up the line—from the *Merry Widow* to President McKinley's Hymn—*Lead, Kindly Light*. They all sounded mighty good and sweet, away out there in the woods, under the stars.

“Ours was more like a camping party than a drilling outfit, and we had some mighty good times. Miss Ginger was the soul of it all. She was one of those women that is always a joy to see. Whether she was in her ‘Sunday-go-to-meeting’ clothes or in tramping togs; she was beautiful, and looked as fresh as a June rose. She had that ‘godless grace and snap and style’ of the New York bred woman that Mark Twain tells of in his *Life on the Mississippi*. Miss Ginger surely was a fine young woman; and every roughneck on the job was dead in love with her; and no wonder, either, because she always treated them all so white.

"We all just loved to hear Miss Ginger talk. She had a voice like a silver gong, and it's chiming in my soul till yet. After telling us about the lively times she had in the East, she would often wind up by saying: 'Well, boys, here's to the "Star" well. Here's hoping it's a gusher; and, if it is, we'll all of us go to New York, and I'll chaperone the crowd.' She was a good woman, too, but just running over with life. Every Sunday, she would sing over at Mr. Irving's church—got up a good choir,—and her voice brought many a roughneck to hear the gospel. I could see that it worried Miss Ginger a good deal because Tom didn't take to much religion.

"Tom and John didn't know any more about the oil business than I do about the tariff; but they had heard of the big fortunes that folks had made

here in Caddo, and had decided to try their luck. They had a lease on a forty-acre tract, and owned a drilling rig that some swindler had sold them for about three times what it was worth. The first two wells they drilled were dry holes. In making locations for these two wells, Tom and John had taken the advice of some experienced oil men; but the locating of the third well was left to Miss Ginger, and she, knowing how Tom loved the lake scenery, picked out a place for the well up on a bluff on the lake. It was a beautiful place all right; and couldn't be improved on for a camp site; but I just knew they would never strike oil there; and it looked to me like they could have found a camp site that would cost them less money by several thousand dollars.

"There just wasn't any counting on

what those young folks would do. For instance, when we were ready to start drilling on the 'Star' well, Miss Ginger and John stepped up on the derrick platform, and John broke a bottle of wine over the drill bit, making a nice little speech at the time. After which, Miss Ginger stood there, with the sun shining on her golden hair, and, looking up through the opening in the trees about the derrick into the blue sky, said a short little prayer for the well. It was said in such a lovely, honest, simple way, that it touched the heart of every roughneck there; and, although it looked all along like it was the unluckiest well I'd ever seen, in the end, the way things have turned out, that little prayer must have gone right straight up to Heaven.

"They called it the 'Star' well; though it seemed to me it ought

to have been the 'Hoodoo,' because it fairly boiled over with bad luck from the start—trouble of one kind or another.

“One day, when the well was down over two thousand feet, something got the matter with the pipe hoist, and John undertook to fix it. He had to put a rope through a pulley-block, up about a hundred feet in the derrick; and, as he had to use both hands to climb the derrick ladder, he tied the end of the rope around his waist. When he got up about seventy-five feet, the loose end of the rope got around the shaft of the drilling engine down on the platform. The engine was running slow, and the shaft was small. John looked down, and seen what was happening. He yelled to someone to stop the engine. Tom made a jump to cut the rope; but, as

Fate would have it, he slipped and fell on the platform—you know, a floor around an engine is always greasy. In less time than it takes to tell it, Tom was up; but that short space of time must have been like eternity to poor John, as his grip was being pulled loose from that ladder. Tom was too late; and as his knife struck the rope, John fell, and his body, with the life crushed out of it, lay quivering on the platform.

“That came mighty near doing Tom up. He would have quit the game right there, I reckon, if it hadn’t been for Miss Ginger. She loved John, too; but, taking it by and large, a woman is a whole lot more practical than a man. Then, too, when a woman is young and pretty, and has had a taste of the life that big money can bring, not alone to herself but to

the folks she loves, the winning or losing of a fortune means a whole lot more to her than to a man.

“So, Tom went on with the well. When they got down about twenty-five hundred feet—around twenty-three hundred feet is the oil strata, he was as blue a looking man as ever I see. Ruin was staring him in the face. He hardly had money enough to pay off the hands. Though he didn’t need it for that so much—I believe them roughnecks would have gone straight through to China, for Miss Ginger’s sake, on no pay,—but the pipe was giving out; and, you know, you can’t drill a well without pipe. Of course, the rig was mortgaged to the last notch.

“Tom wanted to quit, but Miss Ginger kept pushing him on. ‘Just one more day; only one more day,’



Of course, the rig was mortgaged to the last notch.

she'd beg. Well, sir, when we lacked only two joints of pipe of being plumb out, the well came in.

"If you ain't ever seen a big gusher come in, you won't know how it is, because I couldn't halfway begin to tell you. You have to see one. When the first little shudder run over the derrick, I knew what was coming, and told Tom and Miss Ginger. Something was going to happen, and happen right away; but whether it was going to be just a big gas or salt water blow-out, or the nasty, blessed oil, they didn't know. For a little while, you could hear your heart beat, everything was so still. There was another shudder, and the derrick platform seemed to move under your feet like the deck of a ship; then the well tore loose like a monster boiler blowing off, and up shoots a column of oil

through the derrick, and the nasty stuff comes spattering down on everything and everybody.

“When you know it means wealth—the way out of your troubles, debts paid, a fine home, travel and all that—you don’t mind the oil falling on you a bit. It’s the same feeling a fellow has that is baptized with the blood, when he’s killed his first deer. It’s being ‘anointed with the oil of gladness above thy fellows’—anointed ‘with the oil of joy for mourning.’ Everybody was happy, though we was all thinking about poor John, and wishing he was with us. Miss Ginger got plumb hysterical.

“Well, sir, you would think, when that well come in like that, that Fate had played her last card—her trump card; but she hadn’t. The second day, after the well had come in, she had

already poured out more than twenty thousand dollars' worth of oil. Everybody was working on pipe lines and storage tanks. Tom and Miss Ginger were laying their plans to go East; and I was mean enough to be secretly wishing that the well hadn't come in, for the thought of those two people going so far away, and, perhaps, clear out of my life, kinda worried me.

"Along about four o'clock in the evening of the second day, a storm came up. It wasn't much of a storm, and lasted just a few minutes. A flash of lightning blazed down; and by the time the people got up—one workman at the tank never did get up, being killed—and looked towards the well, they seen a column of smoke and flames that boiled up to the very sky and all over it.

"The derrick was burned up in no

time—like that much paper;—and pretty soon, you could see, every now and then, through the shifting flames and smoke, the well pipe, itself. What made matters worse, they had put on a ‘T’ joint on the well, and that poured the oil down on the ground. If it had been a straight pipe, the force of the oil would have put the flames up so high, that the men could have worked on the pipe, right at the mouth of the well.

“When the news of the fire went out through the field—the field is about thirty miles north and south, by ten east and west—the different oil companies and lots of men volunteered to fight the fire. A meeting was held down at Shreveport, that night and the next morning there were fifty boilers on the move, from different parts of the field, to that wild well, and

getting there as fast as mule teams could haul them over those rough roads.

“On the third day the boilers were in place—in batteries of ten—a good piece from the well. Leading down to five main line pipes, there was pipes running from the steam dome of each boiler. The ends of these main lines were run out to the well—pushed out into position, as well as the men could get them in that hell of fire and heat around the well.

“The men made shields—about four feet wide and ten feet high—out of planks and sheet iron, with props back of them, and, in that way, got up tolerable close to the well. There were about a dozen leads of water hose, and, with them, the men put out the fires on the little oil ponds around the well, and also kept the men and

shields from burning up by throwing streams of water on them. You see it wouldn't do no good to put out the well, unless all the fires around it were out, because it would blaze right up again—catching from the gas that always hangs around.

“When everything was ready for the steam blow, it was along about nine o'clock at night. There was a big crowd on hand to see it. People had come from long distances—you could see the glow twenty miles away. There was a moving-picture man there, too. He happened to be down at Shreveport, taking pictures; and when he heard about the burning well he came right on up with his picture machine. Nothing stops them moving-picture men; they are worse than a war correspondent, and try to get right out on the firing line.

"It turned out that this picture man knew Tom and Miss Ginger, having lived and run with them in New York. He was a mighty nice fellow; and Tom and Miss Ginger, after talking with him awhile about the 'old town' as they called New York, seemed more heartened than we had seen them since John got killed. Well, this moving-picture man rigged him up a screen, and got so intent taking them doings around the well, and pushed up so close to the fire, that the heat warped the shutter of his machine and came mighty near putting him out of business.

"There were roughneck heroes there at that fire that night. It's queer how men will do in a time of danger. Although they were only getting cold dollars for their work, they went into that fight on that well and took

chances that would seem, to most folks, fit only for a battle for one's country. Our country, though, after all, means the women and children we love; and most of those roughnecks there loved Miss Ginger, and knew what this well meant to her.

"When the steam was turned on that fire, it sounded like all the thunders and cyclones and cataracts and other rip-roaring things put into one; and you would think it would have put out the fires of hell, itself; but when the steam died down a bit, the fire came roaring up again, worse than before.

"Miss Ginger was plumb sick with disappointment, and so was Tom; but he didn't let down a bit. He just set the men to getting up steam again and told me that the trouble was that the end of one of the main lines wasn't pointed just right at the

fire. In pushing this main line out, it went on the wrong side of a little burned-off stump, and it couldn't be pushed over into the right place on account of that stump. The stump was mighty close up to the well; and when Tom told me that he was going in and throw this pipe over the stump, I told him not to try it till the wind shifted. I went around to the other side of the circle about the well; and, when I looked back, I seen Tom out, behind a screen, and almost to the stump. He had a bar in his hand, and was going to use it as a lever to throw the line pipe over the stump. Just as I looked towards Tom, he jumped out from behind the screen with the lever, and, putting it under, threw the pipe over. I thought he would roast right there. He wheeled around, and as he did, a gust of wind blew

the well fire and smoke over him. Then I saw him reel, with his hands over his face, and stumble and fall.

“Most of the men were over at the boilers; but those that saw, made a rush for the hose lines and for Tom. The whole thing happened in a minute. We heard a scream; and, out from the black of the tree shadows, rushing into the circle of fire, came Miss Ginger, making straight for Tom. People yelled to her to go back. We were on the other side, and couldn’t get to her. She rushed on and in.

“Men with thick boots and leather-like suits can go where fluffy dressed women can’t; and just as she reached Tom, Miss Ginger’s dress must have touched one of the little flames on a small oil pond, or it may have been just the natural heat, itself, that did it; anyway, in a second, a great sheet

of flame seemed to wrap her up and hold her tight. Then, another gust of wind blew the flames and smoke right down over her and Tom. We men went right towards it, and the wind blew off again, and we grabbed Tom and what was left of Miss Ginger. It makes me sick, even now, when I think of it. Every roughneck that had worked with us, and knew all of the loveliness of the soul that had gone out of that poor, black, burned body, that we now laid down and covered with our coats, couldn't help but cry. Not out loud, though, for Tom's sake. He poor soul, couldn't see her—thank God!—his eyes being about burned out of his head, when he fell with his face against that pipe.

“After the ‘Star’ well was put out it flowed seven thousand barrels and over a day for months, and every-

body that had anything to do with it got rich. But John and Ginger and Tom, who started and named it and loved it—Oh, well—life's like that in the oil fields," finished McGraw, stopping his horse, "and here's your prospect."

“Uncle Phil”

A Story from the Yellow Fever Field
(Courtesy of *The Churchman*)

FOR more than two months the citizens of T—— had been guarding the town from an invasion of the dreaded yellow fever.

It was October, and the yellowing leaves and cooling breezes gave promise of the much desired frost that would drive “Yellow Jack” back to his tropical home.

An army of volunteer quarantine guards were still keeping a sharp lookout, both day and night, for anyone from an infected district who might attempt to enter their town.

John Gregg was captain of the force

then on duty, and was riding along the dusty road making the rounds.

As he came in sight of Post No. 6, located on one of the many roads leading out of T——, he was hailed by one of the guards.

"Captain, you're just in time," said the guard to Gregg, as the latter rode up to the little group of men who surrounded a dilapidated wagon, the sole occupant of which was an aged negro.

"There ain't any doubt but what this old fellow came from New Orleans," continued the speaker, as he recklessly pointed his long-barreled revolver toward the battered old derby perched upon the grizzled head of his captive. "Just look at them fine duds. You know nobody but a New Orleans dude could wear such togs. I guess we had better kill the old boy."

"You must be a fool, Peters. Put

that gun up," ordered Gregg, in a tone that had the effect of transferring the smile on Peters's face to the men standing about him. "Where is your pass, uncle? This is a quarantine post, you know, and the men have orders to turn back all persons who haven't certificates."

"Cap'n, I ain't got no stiffkit nur nuttin'," candidly admitted the old negro. "I lives way down yander in the kentry," he continued, indicating the direction of his home by pointing with his whip-staff down the red clay road. "I ain't hyar nuttin' 'bout no kyaranteen. I'se tellin' you de troof, Cap'n. My ole woman hed a bad tetch uv de rheumatiz night afore las', so I fotch a basket uv eggs up, an' 'lowed to buy some liniment."

He paused, but the Captain remained silent.

"No, sir, Cap'n, I ain't got no stiffkit, but I sho' ain't fum New 'rleans. I hopes yo' ain't gwine send me back bedoubt dat liniment, kase my ole woman is sufferin' pow'ful wid de misery. Please don' send me home, Cap'n."

Captain Gregg sat silently upon his horse, flicking at the toe of his riding boot with the long end of the reins. He was endeavoring to formulate some plan which would give the old negro his much-desired liniment. His suppliant was gazing very intently into his face, and presently asked:

"Cap'n, what mought be yo' name?"

"John Gregg."

The face of the old negro fairly shone with joy as he shouted: "Lawd bless my soul, marster. I knowed you wuz some uv my white folks time you squelched dat man what p'inted dat

pistol at me. My white folks tuk moughty good care uv dyah niggers, an' I seen you wuz uv de blood. I sho is proud to see you. Dis is ole Phil Hawes. You 'members me, don't you, Marse John?"

"Why of course I do now, Uncle Phil," replied Captain Gregg warmly. "It's been a long time, though, since we last saw each other. I have been up North for about fifteen years. I've only been back here about six months, and have only been down to the old place twice since my return, and then stayed for such a short time that I couldn't get about to see all of my old friends. I am very glad to see you again. How are you getting along?"

"Jes' tolerable, Marse John, jes' tolerable," replied Uncle Phil, wiping his black though beaming face with a

gloriously red bandana handkerchief, which he then proceeded to stow away in the top of his hat. "Hit 'pears to me like de good ole times is plum' gone fer good. Looks like all de folks is thinkin' 'bout now is makin' money. Plum' 'stracted 'bout money. When I sees de po' white trash puttin' on de airs wid de little buggies, ridin' 'roun' an' settin' up fer somebody, hit sho makes me larf. Ax 'em fer sump'n, an' den yo' see dyah troo blood. Why marster, when dey give a nigger a dime, dey think dey done it all. Hit 'muse me fer sho, 'kase I thinks 'bout dem good ole times when a dime wa'n't nuttin' to a white gent'man.

"I 'members one day yo' pa come troo de fiel', down on de big road, er drivin' over to yo' grandpa's ter see yo' ma. I wuz choppin' cotton, an'

when I look up de road an' see dat black span er horses what he aluz drove I runs to de gate an' opens hit. Yo' pa never stopped, but he holler out: 'Thank you, Phil,' an' wid dat he pitch out sump'n side de road. I picked hit up, an' what yo' reckon hit wuz? Hit wa'n't no fo' bits, an' hit wa'n't no dollar nurr. Hit war a five dollar gol' piece, bless yo' soul. De nex' day I hyarn 'bout yo' bein' born, an' den I knowed why yo' pa never stopped to talk wid me. Mebbe yo' hed sump'n to do wid me gettin' dat gol' piece, Marse John, 'kase I know yo' pa sho wuz glad an' proud when yo' come.

“I tell yo', marster, dat's de way de folks ac' in dem days. Dat's de way quality folks ac'.

“Marse John, yo' ain't got a little terbacky 'bout yo', is yo'? I'se plum'

'stracted fer a smoke. Thank 'e, suh, thank 'e.

"Now, marster, what yo' gwine do wid dis po' ole nigger? Yo' ain't gwine sen' me back widout lettin' me go in town, is yo'? My ole woman is jes' 'bleeged to hev dat liniment, an' I ain't gwine to resk to go home be-doubt hit, ef her arm is crippled wid de rheumatiz."

Captain Gregg looked somewhat worried over this direct request for judgment in a matter wherein the comfort of a rheumatic woman and the safety of her husband were the issues involved, and hesitated a few moments before he replied.

"Uncle Phil, this is a serious matter. We have positive instructions not to allow anyone to come in town, unless they have health certificates. You know I would be glad to help you."

Let me see," he continued, "I think I can fix it. You just wait right here till I return. I won't be gone long. What sort of liniment did your wife want? 'Lightning Rod?' All right. You stay right here till I come."

Leaving the old negro, Captain Gregg rode across to a suburban home, some quarter of a mile distant, where he telephoned in town to a friend to send assistance in the shape of a trusty negro boy. When he returned to the quarantine post, he found Uncle Phil seated under a big tree enjoying a smoke from the tobacco which his diplomacy had secured from his "young marster."

Captain Gregg dismounted, and, almost instinctively, Phil hastened to take the reins from him, and hitch the young man's horse to a near-by rail fence. Then taking a seat at a

little distance from Captain Gregg, he remarked:

"'Pears like de yaller fever is 'batin' down some, ain't it, marster? I ain't hyarn 'bout none fer a coon's age."

"Why, yes, Uncle Phil," replied Gregg. "Yellow Jack will be a thing of the past in New Orleans, after this year. You know, for years the doctors didn't know what caused the fever, but now they have found out that it is only spread by a mosquito, and as the mosquito can be exterminated, the problem is solved."

"I aluz did disdain a miserable skeeter," observed Uncle Phil. "I trus' dey will sterminate him. If hit's a skeeter what perjuce de yaller fever, dey sho come nigh gittin' yo' pa."

"I 'members when he had dis same yaller fever in dis same town what yinner is gyardin' now. Hit war en-

jurin' uv de wah. I wuz yo' grandpa's kerige driver, an' I stayed 'roun' de big house mos' all de time. When de news come dat yo' pa wuz took down, Miss Mary wuz plum' 'stracted. Nobody ain't tell me so, but I knowed dat Miss Mary and Marse Henry wuz engage' befo' he went off to de wah. I say nobody ain't tell me dis, but I tell yo', Marse John, dyah's some things a pusson don' have to be tol', an' dis wuz one uv 'em. I used to be one mo' fiddler 'fo' I got 'ligion, an' I sot up many a night a playin' fer de balls, an' I would 'a' had to be plum' blin' ef I ain't seen dat Miss Mary an' Marse Henry love one nurr. I jes' seen it shinin' troo dey eyes.

“Well, suh, yo' grandpa wuz over to de ribber place when de news come, an' couldn't er got back under a week. Dyah wa'n't nobody wid Miss Mary

but her aunty, ole Miss Sarah. (Yo' do' 'member her; she died when you wa'n't nuttin' but a baby.) Miss Sarah wuz moughty good in some ways, but I's bound to admit she wuz pow'ful sot in her ways. My ole woman, Rose (she wuz de house gal den), say Miss Mary went to Miss Sarah an' jes' beg her to take her to town so she could nuss Marse Henry but Miss Sarah say no indeed she won't, dat hit won't be proper, an' 'lowed she wa'n't gwine let Miss Mary go. Miss Mary she cry an' 'lowed she jes' 'bleeged to go.

"Yo' see it wuz like dis: De wuz a triffin' white boy on de place, name Flanders, what yo' grandpa used to sen' over to de boat landin' for de mail. He loose a letter what Marse Henry writ to Miss Mary. He ain't tell nobody nuttin' 'bout it. Nex' time he goes fer de mail (we jes' git de mail

once a week) he seen a letter fum Marse Henry to Miss Mary, an' what yo' reckon dat po' trash done? He keep de letter, 'kase he wuz skeered dat hit would tell 'bout dat urr letter what he done loose. I found de las' letter in a crack side de corn crib, whar it been hid 'bout two weeks, an' I fetch it up to de big house, an' han' it to Miss Sarah. She call dat Flanders boy up, an' arfter he lie 'roun' 'bout it some, he jes' bust out wid de whole troof.

"I knowed den what it wuz dat had mek Miss Mary look so po'ly an' bothered. Dat wuz on a Monday dat I fin' de letter, an' hit war de nex' day dat de news come 'bout Marse Henry bein' tuk wid de yaller fever.

"Rose she tell me she heah Miss Mary, when she war beggin' Miss Sarah to tek her to town, say, 'I jes'

'bleeged to go to him now. When I ain't heah fum him in three weeks, 'kase er dat horrid Flanders, I thinks he ain't keer fer me. Hit hu't me dat bad, I jes' write him a turrible letter, an' tol' him I ain't never love him, an' for him to sen' back all my letters. I tells him I ain't never wan' see his face ag'in. An' now he's dyin', an' no one to nuss him. Oh Aunt Sarah, I jes' bleeged to go to him.'

"Miss Sarah sot her jaw right tight, an' 'lowed, she wa'n't go' 'low Miss Mary to go. 'I's got charge er you,' sez she, 'an' I ain't gwine let you disgrace de Leigh name wid no sech actin'.'

"Miss Mary beg an' beg, but it wa'n't no use. When Miss Sarah say no she mean no, an' dey ain't nuttin' gwine budge her.

“Well, Miss Mary see she can’t convert Miss Sarah ef she cry her eyes plum’ out. So she jes’ goes an’ locks herself up in her room. Miss Sarah she thinks she hed done right, an’ dat she hed done squelch Miss Mary, but she wuz wrong ’bout dat.

“Dat night, when I wuz puttin’ water in de kitchen, my ole woman whispered to me, dat Miss Mary want to speak wid me ’roun’ to her room winder. So I slipped ’roun’ dar, an’ fin’ young Miss settin’ in de winder. Hit wuz deep dusk, but I could see her face wuz ez white ez a sheet. ‘Phil,’ sez she, an’ her voice shook pow’ful, ‘I’ve helped you out uv trouble once or twice, an’ I wants ter see if you ’preciates it.’

“I lowed dyar wa’n’t nuttin’ I would-n’t do fer her. (All of ole marster’s niggers loved Miss Mary. She sho

wuz a angel on dat place, an' de overseer what would strike one of ole marster's niggers onjesly had better keep hit fum Miss Mary, 'kase she sho would mek her pa tu'n him off.)

"'Phil,' sez she, 'I's got to go to town to-night, an' I wants you to drive me an' Rose dar in de kerige. Aunt Sarah don' want me to go, so I's got to slip away. You get the kerige ready an' keep it down to the big gate. We will get away jes' as soon as we can. You be ready, an' wait fer us at de big gate till we come.'

"I jes' sez, 'Alright, little Miss, Phil will be dar.'

"I wuz feelin' sorter narvous like, dat night. I ain't min' de drive, but I feel jubous 'kase I knowed how ole marster love little Miss, an' I wuz feared she would get de yaller fever an' die. I wa'n't skeered 'bout me

an' Rose, 'kase a nigger don' have yaller fever, nohow.

“Howsomever, I hitch up dat kerige jes' as soon as I got troo totin' in my wood an' water. De kerige house was moughty close to de big house, an' I hed to be moughty quiet to keep ole Miss Sarah fum hearin'. I sat up in de kerige a long time, an' hed sorter drap off to sleep when Miss Mary an Rose come.

“We drove 'way pow'ful quiet, an' de ain't none uv us say nuttin' fer a good while. Den Rose tells me dat de reason dey wuz so late wuz bekase ole Miss Sarah jes' wouldn' go to bed. Sez she wuz kind er 'spicious like, walkin' up an' down on de big front piazza. I ain't say so, but I thought ole Miss Sarah wuz troubled wid 'morselessness 'bout de way she wuz treatin' Miss Mary.

"I never is to forgit dat trip to town. Dey wa'n't nobody got kilt, an' de wa'n't nobody got hu't; but, somehow, I wuz feelin' pow'ful onres'-less. I spec' it wuz 'kase I wuz reskin' ole marster's lone chile to de yaller fever. Anyhow, I sho ain't enjoy dat drive.

"Hit got cloudy 'fo' we drive five miles. De win' 'gin to blow pow'ful brisk. When we pass troo ole Cun'l Mason's place, down by de byar whar his son Joe wuz drowneded, de win' in de big pines wuz mo'nin' g'as'ly. De trees grow moughty rank 'long side de byar, mekin' hit plum' dark. Ez luck would hev it, de bre's' yoke come onloose jes' as we drive down to de fo'd. I aluz did hate to go 'roun' dat place arfter dark, 'kase it wuz harnted. Well, suh, when I jumped out de kerige to fix de bre's' yoke, I

stumbled an' fall over sump'n what move under me. De thing riz up under me, an' de fuss thing I knowed, I wuz right on top er one er ole Cun'l Mason's cows. She run right in de fo'd, an' I pitched in de water. Hit wa'n't deep, an' I ain't got wet much, but I's boun' to admit I shiver monstrous fer moughty nigh fo' miles. Rose wuz skeered to death till she fin' out what wuz de fac', den she larf fit to kill. Hit 'muse Miss Mary, too, an' she sho needed hit, 'kase she wuz pow'ful low in sperits.

"Arfter 'while de rain an' de lightnin' an' de win' all come down. I fasten de kerige curtains tight, so Miss Mary wouldn' git wet.

"Yo' know fer to be ole marster's kerige driver I's bound to know sump'n 'bout pullin' de lines; but, I tell yo', Marse John, dat wuz one night dis

ole nigger comed moughty nigh givin' up. Wid de win' an' de rain blowin' in my eyes, an' de lightnin' er blazin' an' bangin' an' blindin', I couldn't see de hawses, let 'lone de road. I come so nigh drivin' off de high bridge dat my heart plum' stopped beatin' fer 'bout five minutes, I reckon; an' onct a tree blowed down 'cross de road so close behin' us dat de little limbs slapped on de top uv de kerige.

"Jes' as we driv into town, de sun wuz risin'. I couldn't tell ef Miss Mary wuz tired or not, 'kase she hed her face all kivered up wid a big veil. We driv right down to de 'Battle house' whar Marse Henry wuz.

"De town she did look terrible lonesome. I ain't seen but jes' 'bout a dozen people, an' we ain't pass but two wagons, an' one dem hed a coffin in it. I hope Miss Mary never seen it.

“When we ’rive’ at de ‘Battle house,’ Miss Mary hardly wait fer de kerige to stop ’fo’ she jumps out an’ run right up de steps wid Rose behin’ her. De big front do’ wuz open, an’ little Miss stepped right easy into de hall, an’ I seen her raise her han’ right swif’ to her th’oat an’ walk in a room side de hall.

“Dat evenin’ Rose tells me, dat when her an’ Miss Mary step in de hall dey see Marse Henry lyin’ on a bed in dey room j’inin’ de hall. Dar wuz a no ’count white man, s’pose to be a nuss, settin’ side de bed sound asleep, an’ po’ Marse Henry wuz a burnin’ up wid de fever, plum’ outen he haid, beggin’ fer water. Rose fetch in some cool water fum de well, an’ Miss Mary gin a little uv it to Marse Henry, an’ den she bathe he haid wid a cool wet rag.

"Rose sez dat no 'count nuss ain't wake up fer moughty nigh er hour. When he seen Miss Mary in de room he tells her she got to lef'. But she 'lowed dat she ain't gwine budge.

"Pres'n'y, de doctor come in. He look like he gwine hev a fit when he seen Miss Mary, an' say she jes' bound to leave de house; but Miss Mary beg so pitiful an' begin to cry, so de doctor sort er melt down, an' tell her dat bein' as she wuz in de house she gwine hev de yaller fever anyhow, she jes' ez well stay. He 'sist on her gwine an' res' herself, do.

"De folks what wuz livin' in de house when Marse Henry wuz diskivered to hev de yaller fever hed run away like a pa'cel er rabbits, but in de 'citement dey hed lef' 'most ev'ything in de house. So Miss Mary an' Rose fix up a room upstairs, an' dar dey camp.

"When I went in de room an' see Marse Henry, my heart jes' ached fer him and po' little Miss. He had done had de fever tree er fo' days 'fo' we wuz notify, an' sho looked turrible sick—all yaller an' burnt up wid de fever. I sot up wid him dat night.

"Late de nex' evenin', I went in de room. Miss Mary an' de doctor wuz in dar. Marse Henry looked to'ds me, an' hit seem like he kinder smile; den he let he eyes res' on Miss Mary's face jes' like yo' see a baby look. I see by de joyful 'spression on little Miss' face dat he war better. Her face looked mo' natchel den it hed fer a week or mo'.

"Fum dat on, Marse Henry begin to diskiver he strength back.

"Hit war on a Wednesday dat we git to town, an' on Sat'day ole marster comed. Miss Mary seen him when he

driv up, an' she ran out to meet him at de do'. He looked pow'ful ashy an' stormy when he fust come, but when he had seen po' Marse Henry, an' de doctor had tol' him dat we alls had plum' pulled Marse Henry fum de grave wid our nussin', he gin in. Arfter dat de wa'n't no better nuss in de house den ole marster. He wuz jes' ez tender wid him ez a woman. I kinder b'l'eve Marse Henry 'minded marster of his boy, young Marse Ben, what died off at college wid de fever 'fo' de wah started.

"One day arfter Marse Henry had got so he could sorter notice 'roun' some, I wuz in de room, an' I hyarn him ax ole marster ef him an' Miss Mary couldn't git married right den; he sez he had ax Miss Mary an' she wuz willin'. De room wuz sorter dark, an' he never knowed I wuz dar. I

'lowed dat wa'n't no place for me, so I slips out to de back yard. Miss Mary wuz settin' on de back po'ch, an' she axed me to climb up in er maple tree, what growed in de back yard, an' brek her some leaves what hed done tu'n purty.

“While I wuz up de tree, Rose comed out to de back do', an' tell Miss Mary her pa want speak wid her. 'Peared to me Miss Mary mus' er knowed 'bout de words what I hed jes' hyarn Marse Henry ax ole marster, 'kase when Rose called her, she tu'n jes' ez red ez de leaves she wuz holdin', an' she wuz moughty slow 'bout goin' in de house.

“I don' know what kinder pertickler business ole marster hed to discuss wid Miss Mary, an' it wa'n't none er my business nurr, but I does know dat when ole Dr. Taylor (he war de preacher what baptize you, Marse John). come

to de house dat evenin', he had he little grip wid him.

"Ole marster called me in de sick room. Ole Dr. Taylor had on his white robe, standin' by de bed. Miss Mary wuz standin' dar 'longside er ole marster, an' my Rose wuz behin' 'em.

"Marse Henry was pow'ful pale; he had he ha'r bresh up right brave, do, an' he look moughty happy ef he war flat er his back. When it come his time to 'sponse, his voice soun' moughty weak, but he war married jes' de same.

"Well, suh, arfter dat Miss Mary sho did nuss him. She wuz dat pertickler I thought she wuz gwine kill Marse Henry. De doctor say, ef it ain't been fer Miss Mary's good nussin' Marse Henry sho would er died. Yo' know ev'ything's in de nussin' wid de yaller fever.

“None uv us ain’t had de fever, an’ we tuk Marse Henry home in ’bout two weeks. ’Twa’n’t long ’fo’ he j’ined his regiment, an’ he tuk me wid him. Talk ’bout times, Marse John, I tell yo’ I seen times wid marster den.”

Uncle Phil was just about to launch forth into the history of the “wah,” when a negro boy drove up in a cart with the supplies ordered by Captain Gregg. Those were soon transferred to Uncle Phil’s wagon.

While this was being done, Captain Gregg explained to the old negro that he was sending a few extras to Aunt Rose with his compliments. He then handed a dollar to Uncle Phil in payment for the eggs.

Uncle Phil held the silver in his hand, eyeing it solemnly. “Marse John,” he said, presently, “I don’ likes de idea uv sellin’ my white folks things.

Hit jes' natcherly ain't right; hit ain't like ole times."

"There is no selling about it, Uncle Phil," Captain Gregg said apologetically. "You made me a present of some nice fresh eggs, and I have sent Aunt Rose a few groceries. Now I've given you a little change for yourself. I surely have a right to do that, haven't I?"

Phil's countenance cleared, as he said: "Marse John, yo' is a chip off de ole block, sho nuff."

"Now, Jim," said Captain Gregg, turning to the boy in the cart, "take these eggs up to Colonel Lewis's, with this note."

"Up whar I carried them flowers to de young lady, yesterday, Mr. John?" inquired the boy.

Captain Gregg nodded.

Uncle Phil seemed interested. Lean-

ing out of his wagon toward Captain Gregg, he whispered: "Marse John, hit looks like yo' gwine give dis ole nigger a young mistis." And judging from the chuckle that accompanied this remark, there was no serious objection to be looked for from him.

Then he gathered up his reins, and with many bows and expressions of thanks and praise, he started on his journey toward home and his rheumatic Rose.

Only a Snipe

(Courtesy of *The Christian Herald*)

“The leper raised not the gold from the
dust:—

‘Better to me the poor man’s crust,
Better the blessing of the poor,
Though I turn me empty from his door:
That is no true alms which the hand
can hold;

He gives only the worthless gold
Who gives from a sense of duty;
But he who gives but a slender mite,
And gives to that which is out of
sight,—

That thread of the all-sustaining
Beauty
Which runs through all and doth all
unite,—

The hand cannot clasp the whole of
his alms,
The heart outstretches its eager palms;

For a god goes with it and makes it
store

To the soul that was starving in
darkness before.'"

The Vision of Sir Launfal.

I NEVER hear or read any lines from
The Vision of Sir Launfal but
what I think of McWillie and of a
story he told me of a man with whom
he had worked on the "Cisco" railroad.
McWillie is a civil engineer; and as
such saw all sorts of life. A man of his
profession, you know, may spend all the
day slopping around in mud and water,
and associating with all sorts of "rough-
necks," and that night be in his full
dress at some swell social function.

McWillie told me this story in the
Bruly railway station while we were
waiting for a down train. How he
came to tell it was this way: A rail-

road employee came along, and talked with Mac for awhile about the work on a new branch road where Mac had been running some lines and, as the railroad man was leaving, Mac called to him and asked what had become of one Thompson. "He's down and out. Only a snipe now." was the reply. "Only a 'snipe,' huh," said Mac, with a disgusted accent on the "only."

I thought I was pretty well up on railroad lingo, having traveled for several years, but "snipe" was a new one on me, and not wishing to wander farther in ignorance, I asked my friend to enlighten me.

"There was a time when I didn't know what a 'snipe' was, myself," said Mac encouragingly. "I'll tell you what a 'snipe' is." He climbed up on a baggage truck, settled himself comfortably, and went on: "During

the high water of 1912, I was rushed up to our big bridge on the Atchafalaya to help save it. We had some gang up there, believe me. You know the Atchafalaya is one of the most treacherous rivers in the South. It is hard enough to keep up with its shenanigans when it's down, but in high water, when the Mississippi is sending some of her overplus through that way on a short cut to the Gulf, she's as full of tricks as a cage full of monkeys, as terrible and powerful as millions of gorillas, and more deceitful than Machiavelli.

"I remember I was sent up there once, when the water was tolerably high, to investigate the foundations. I sounded backward and forward around the piers, and found everything as lovely and smooth as you would in the mildest mannered river in the world.

It was too good: I became suspicious. The more I thought it over, the surer I was that she had something hid from me. My train was late, so I took my lead up above the bridge and dropped it in only to find a good solid bottom, just where it should be. With any other stream I should have felt ashamed of myself, but with the Atchafalaya, no. I was on to her curves, so went up just a little bit farther, dropped in my lead two hundred feet, and found no bottom! That river was eating her way to the bridge at the rate of more than fifty feet per day; and it would not have been many days before she would have eaten the bridge and, maybe, a nice juicy trainload of passengers. You bet there was some tall pile driving going on there the next day; and the big cypress trees out of the 'forest primeval,' impelled

by a giant pile-driver, were standing on their heads in that river bottom a whole lot closer together than they had ever been before; and that sand and mud food was so filled with those seventy-foot splinters that the old lady gave up eating it. She likely turned her attention to some poor levee miles below, where, with the help of a few crayfish holes, she'd eat her way out to thousands of acres of young sugar-cane.

“But that has nothing much to do with my ‘snipe’ yarn. As I was saying, it was high water time, and I had been sent to help save the bridge. The Atchafalaya was levee top high; and it looked as if nothing short of a nice \$50,000.00 steel bridge would appease her dainty appetite. It was about the middle of June, and our work-train

‘. . . lay

In a sidin’ through the day,
Where the ’eat would make your
bloomin’ eyebrows crawl.’

“The whole gang, with a few exceptions, from the chief to the water-boy, was hot and, more or less, mad and cranky. One of these exceptions was a short, red-headed, freckled-faced, middle-aged man with large ears and kindly eyes. His ugliness would attract almost anyone. I was used to seeing lots of ugly ‘roughnecks,’ though, and the thing that got me interested in him was, first, that I recalled having seen him, about six months before, do something quite unusual, and, secondly, because I noticed that he was always doing some unselfish thing. The six months ago thing was this: It was up on the ‘Cisco’ branch, where I had been

running some levels for a new trestle. I was there for only a part of a day. Just before I left, I saw this little fellow, named McCrea, mix in with a little affair of one of the 'squawks.' A 'squawk' is a 'straw boss,' that is a sort of under boss who works just a few men. Clothed with a little brief authority, they often get awfully stuck on themselves and become tyrannous. This particular 'squawk' had a big supply of muscle and profanity and, seemingly, no heart. One of his men was a poor, weak, little 'Cajun,' and because the little fellow just naturally didn't have the 'punch' in him to move some of the work quickly, it nettled the 'squawk,' and it looked like he took a delight in picking on the man, and would purposely throw him in all sorts of tight places so as to burn him out. If the 'Cajun'

burned out, all the 'squawk' had to do was to holler: 'Gimme another hat' (a 'hat' is just a man—good, bad, or indifferent), and he would be given another worker. Squawk didn't speak any French, and the 'Cajun' didn't understand much English, but he did understand enough to know when Squawk vilely cursed him, and he said to Squawk, with a meaning shake of his head: '*Vous ne devais plus parlez de cette manière,*' or something like that, meaning, 'Don't talk that way to me any more.'

"Squawk either understood it, or didn't understand and thought the 'Cajun' was cursing him, maybe; anyway, he gave the little fellow a mean shove, and cursed him fiercely. That little 'Cajun' hopped on him like a wild-cat, but Squawk was many times his match, and in a jiffy had the

'Cajun' out at arm's length pounding his face into pulp. This was the opportunity that Squawk had been looking for—to teach his men his power: but he had underrated one of them—this red-headed fellow McCrea, who, in less time than it takes to tell it, had jumped into the fight, thrown the 'Cajun' aside, and with a few steam-hammer blows and some jiu-jitsu movements, had Squawk whipped to a frazzle. My train pulled out just after the fight, but I heard afterwards that McCrea had been discharged for insubordination. I hadn't seen him again until I met him on that work up there on the bridge. I took an interest in the fellow, and soon discovered that he was always on the 'firing line,' ready to do more than his share of every piece of work. If he was helping carry a piece of

timber, and the man on his hand-stick looked worn out or less strong than himself, McCrea would get up a little on the stick, and thus take some of the other fellow's load. He was all man, though, and saw to it that no one intentionally imposed upon him. I was standing near him on the works, and, in the course of his remarks, I heard him quote some appropriate line from Kipling's *Gunga Din*. That night, after supper, he was out putting a patch on his mosquito bar, and I struck up a conversation with him by offering him some of my 'Skeeter-Skoot.' We chatted for quite a while. I asked him if he was Scotch. 'Well, yes,' he replied, 'in a way I am. My father was Scotch, Irish, and English: my mother is part French and English. Her father was a German Jew. I'm just a plain American.' I told him

that I heard him quote some Kipling, and asked him how he liked him. Of course he agreed with me in thinking Kipling great. There was nothing of the pedant about the fellow. In fact, he murdered the King's English worse than Kipling's East Indians did at times; but I soon learned that he had been a great reader—not by his saying so, for anyone can do that, but because of his intimate acquaintance with many characters of good fiction who were dear to me. I talked books with him, and wished I had had some with me; though I believe a man caught with a book in daytime in that rush would have been shot on the spot; and at night the mosquitoes would have eaten you up about the lights, or you'd have burned up your mosquito bar in getting one of our dingy old kerosene lamps close up enough to read by.

“When a costly bridge is in danger, railroad officials don’t lose any time in placing their guests at the tea-party; and so it turned out that McCrea, who had so nobly assisted the ‘Cajun,’ was working right along now with Squawk. McCrea was nice enough, and seemed to have forgiven everything. Not so with Squawk. He had been ragged many, many times about that beating, and was now looking for any opening for a chance to get even. Once, when McCrea jumped in and helped take off an unnecessary strain that Squawk had thrown on a negro workman, I heard Squawk say something desperately unpleasant and uncomplimentary. McCrea heard him but paid no attention to it.

“We were right in the hottest of the fight for the bridge, building braces and cribbing to break the force of the

rushing water, when Squawk, who was at the time actually working, lost his balance, and fell off the bridge railing. In falling, his head struck a projecting beam that knocked him senseless. Just as he struck the water, the suspender of his overalls caught on a spike; but the water sucked his body under the timbers, and he would have drowned in a few minutes, had it not been for McCrea. There was no lack of ropes at hand; and McCrea grabbed the end of one, and jumped off the bridge. The water was only a few feet below; but the way it was snatching and sucking about those piers and pilings was awful. McCrea didn't have to do any swimming for he had hardly struck the water when he was driven like a chip against the pilings where Squawk was caught. The hardest thing he had to do was to hold on with

one hand tight enough to keep from being sucked under, while he made the rope fast to Squawk. It only took him a few seconds to do this; and we soon pulled Squawk up on the bridge. McCrea was now holding on with both hands, with his back upstream; but before we could untie the rope off Squawk, a big timber swirled through and struck McCrea with the force of a projectile. The end of the timber was a jagged splinter, that struck right through McCrea's body below the right shoulder blade. There was no danger of his sinking, stuck on like that; and we rigged up some poles and lines as fast as we could, and soon had the poor fellow, along with Squawk, carrying them to the camp car. Squawk regained consciousness in a little while, but was as weak as a cat from the cut in the head and his

ducking. Poor McCrea had never entirely lost consciousness, and suffered terribly until the King Snipe gave him morphine. His wound was fatal. A man was rushed off on a motorcycle to Birma, a few miles above, to bring a doctor; and we telephoned to have number fifty-three stop at the bridge and take McCrea down to the city. On account of the high water above the train was delayed. The morphine eased McCrea, but didn't put him asleep; and he called for me. I knew he was dying; and in the presence of that little, red-headed, freckled-faced (the freckles showed plainly now, his face was so white), big-eared man, I felt confused and ashamed. He asked me if I had a Bible. I didn't have a Bible, and would have given a month's salary for one or a prayer-book; and told him so. He asked me if I had

anything I could read to him. I remembered that I had a small book of Lowell's poems in my coat pocket at the bridge, and hurried off to get it. When I returned McCrea had his eyes closed. I thought he was asleep or, perhaps, dead; but he said, without opening his eyes, 'Please read *The Vision of Sir Launfal*.' It was mighty hard for me to make my voice behave, but I read. When I got to that place where Sir Launfal shared his crust with, and gave water to, the leper, and read what the leper, transformed, said, I knew McCrea understood. You remember how it goes:

“Lo, it is I, be not afraid!
In many climes, without avail,
Thou hast spent thy life for the
Holy Grail:
Behold, it is here,—this cup which
thou

Didst fill at the streamlet for me
but now;

This crust is my body broken for
thee,

This water His blood that died on
the tree;

The Holy Supper is kept indeed

In whatso we share with another's
need.

Not what we give, but what we
share,—

For the gift without the giver is
bare;

Who gives himself with his alms
feeds three,—

Himself, his hungering neighbor, and
Me.'

“Squawk, who was on a cot, just a little way off, understood too; for he came over, and thanked McCrea, and told him in a shaky voice that he was truly sorry for all he had said and done. I didn't know it was in Squawk to do

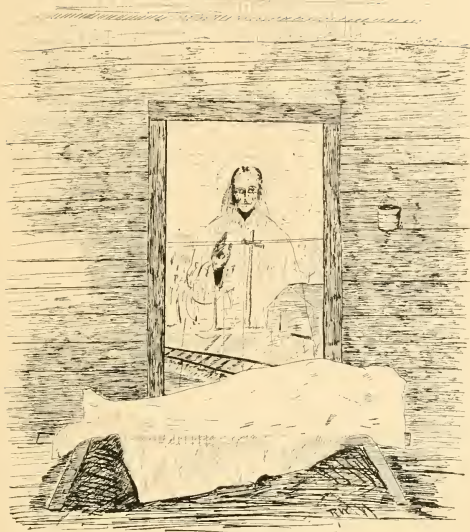
such a big thing. I have heard since that he is a changed man, and is patient and fair with his gang. I sat with McCrea for about an hour—until he died. I thought a whole lot while I was sitting there—of how many of us are missing the Gate. ‘Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.’ When I got up there were tears in my eyes—and it seemed that I almost saw Him standing before me,

“ . . . glorified

Shining and tall and fair and straight
As the pillar that stood by the Beautiful Gate,—

Himself the Gate whereby men can
Enter the temple of God in Man.’”

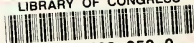
Our train was blowing for the station.
McWillie slid down off the baggage



—and it seemed that I almost saw Him standing
before me.

truck, and said: "A 'snipe' is a railroad section hand; a 'king snipe' is a section boss. McCrea was only a 'snipe.' "

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